

'Britain is watching this school experiment, Anglesey leads the way'. A forgotten pioneer? Anglesey's comprehensive system, circa 1953-1970.

Anglesey was a prominent pioneer of comprehensive education in the 1950s and 1960s. Despite this, however, if you were to discuss comprehensive schooling and education with somebody today, it is highly unlikely that they would be aware of the fact that the first fully comprehensive scheme in England and Wales was introduced on Anglesey as early as 1953. While a handful of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) had established isolated comprehensive schools prior to this (in fact the secondary school in Holyhead was officially reorganised into a comprehensive in 1949), no other LEA had thus far introduced a fully comprehensive system of secondary education. However, once the county's four secondary schools had been turned into comprehensives, Anglesey did indeed become the first ever pioneer of a fully comprehensive system in England and Wales.¹

Despite Anglesey's prominence in the field of secondary school reform, minimal interest has been paid to these developments in existing scholarship.² In light of this, the key objective of this article is to emphasise the role which Anglesey played in the field of comprehensive schooling, and to illustrate its place within the wider historiography. The main argument here is that the exclusion of early pioneers of comprehensive schooling, such as Anglesey, from the historiography has resulted

¹ The Isle of Man had in fact introduced a comprehensive system by this time as well, however, due to its exceptional autonomy from the rest of Britain it was outside the influence of the Ministry of Education. Therefore, this officially left Anglesey the only LEA with a fully comprehensivised system up until 1965. For more on the Isle of Man scheme, see H., Bird, *An Island That Led – The History of Manx Education* (Volume 1) (Port St. Mary, 1995) and R. H., Kinvig, *The Isle of Man A social, cultural and political history* (Liverpool, 1975), pp. 162-163.

² Anglesey is not mentioned at all in, for example, C. Benn and C. Chitty, *Thirty Years on Is Comprehensive Education Alive and Well or Struggling to Survive?* (London, 1996); G. E. Jones, *The Education of a Nation* (Cardiff, 1997); and I. G. K. Fenwick, *The Comprehensive School 1944-1970: The politics of secondary school reorganization* (London, 1976). There are brief comments on Anglesey's scheme in, for example, M. Benn, *School Wars The Battles for Britain's Education* (London, 2011), p. 49; A.C. Kerckhoff, K. Fogelman, D. Crook and D. Reeder, *Going Comprehensive in England and Wales A Study of Uneven Change* (London, 1996), p. 19; C. Benn and B. Simon, *Half Way There: Report on the British Comprehensive School Reform Second Edition* (Harmondsworth, 1972), pp. 44-45; G. E. Jones and G. E. Roderick, *A History of Education in Wales* (Cardiff, 2003), p. 148. A few more details are given about developments on Anglesey in D. Rubinstein and B. Simon, *The Evolution of the Comprehensive School, 1926-1972 2nd edn.* (London, 1973), pp. 46-47. The most detailed account of some of the developments on Anglesey during the 1940s and 1950s is provided in G. E. Jones, *Which Nation's Schools?* (Cardiff, 1990), pp. 107-109, 161-167. Jones acknowledged historical reasons for Anglesey's multilateralism, and also evaluated the protests that emerged during the relocation of David Hughes School from Beaumaris to Menai Bridge.

in a misrepresentation of events as they actually unfolded during the 1950s and 1960s. An analysis of the extent and nature of contemporary public interest in the scheme will reveal Anglesey's prominence within the wider educational context of the time. Therefore, it is also suggested that Anglesey, together with other early rural counties that pioneered comprehensive schemes, deserve a more prominent role in existing scholarship.

As far as Anglesey's support for comprehensive schooling was concerned, the Education Committee had advocated a multilateral system of secondary education for many years. In practice this would mean that different 'types' of secondary education, both practical and academic, would be provided within the same school. This kind of school organisation went against the convention of education systems incorporating different types of secondary schools (grammar, modern and technical) which was favoured by most LEAs and central government in the post-war period. Thus, while the reorganisation of Anglesey's schools into comprehensives by 1953 constituted early experimentation with this kind of schooling, the desire to avoid a segregated education system did not constitute novel thinking on behalf of the Education Committee. Central government had encouraged the introduction of 'Central Schools' alongside grammar schools from the mid-1920s onwards. However, Anglesey had resisted this kind of reorganisation throughout the 1930s.³ The Education Committee had envisaged a multilateral system of secondary education as early as 1931, and in the 1936 Development Plan (submitted to the Board of Education (BoE)) multilateralism was favoured once again.⁴ While the BoE consistently refused the Education Committee's clamour for multilateral schools, the Development Plans of the 1930s nevertheless provided a blueprint for the comprehensive scheme which would eventually be approved by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in

³ Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on The Education of the Adolescent* (London, 1926).

⁴ Multilateral schools were secondary schools where different 'types' of education (so academic, technical and more vocational subjects) were provided alongside each other but within the same school. For the 1931 report, see A[ngeley] E[ducation] C[ommittee], 'Proposal for Reorganisation', 2 July 1931, Llangefni, A[ngeley] A[rchives]: WA 4/18. For the proposal in 1936, see AEC, 'Proposal for Educational Development in Anglesey', 17 September 1936, London, TNA: ED 16 / 827.

1948.⁵ In fact, up until 1947 the projected schools were referred to as 'multilateral' rather than comprehensive. The change in terminology occurred as a result of the issuing of a ministerial memorandum in that year, and it was the MoE's definition of comprehensive schooling that encouraged the change in name from multilateral to comprehensive schools. The MoE's definition established that:

...a comprehensive school means one which is intended to cater for all the secondary education of all the children in a given area without an organisation into three sides.⁶

It was this, then, that made the Education Committee realise that what it was planning; one secondary school for each catchment area, admitting all pupils of secondary school age (irrespective of ability and without entrance examinations), constituted comprehensive schools rather than multilateral ones.⁷

Prior to the new comprehensive school arrangements, which were gradually implemented in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the LEA's school provision consisted of three grammar schools: Holyhead, Llangefni and Beaumaris. In addition, there was also the St. Cybi School in Holyhead which was a Central (or technical) School, as well as many elementary 'all-age' schools that provided instruction for senior pupils who were not in attendance at any of the grammar schools. Even though all-age schools provided education for senior pupils, this provision was not formally considered to be 'secondary education'.⁸ The Education Committee had also pursued the establishment of a new

⁵ P[ost] W[ar] D[evelopment of] E[ducation] S[ub] C[ommittee], 'Minute Book: Letter from the MoE', 21 May 1948, Llangefni, AA: WA/1/39.

⁶ M[inistry] o[f] E[ducation], 'Circular 144', 16 June 1947, London, T[he] [National] A[rchive]: ED 142/1.

⁷ PWDESC, 'Minutes', 27 November 1947, Llangefni, AA: PRO, WA/1/39.

⁸ There also existed both Church of England and Catholic schools on Anglesey that provided 'secondary education'. There were prolonged discussions during the 1930s and 1940s between the Education Committee and the managers of these schools and the Diocesan Education Committee about which schools that would be providing secondary education, and how voluntary schools would be compensated if they were to lose their senior pupils to the new comprehensive schools. See, for example, AEC, 'Letter reproduced in Education Committee Minutes 1934-38', 2 December 1937, Llangefni, AA: WA 1/100; 'Letter from Humphreys to the BoE', 17 December 1937, London, TNA: ED 16/827; PWDESC, 'Minutes', 29 August 1946, Llangefni: WA 1/39 and BoE, 'Interview Memorandum', 6 September 1938, London, TNA: ED 35/6804

grammar school in Amlwch for a prolonged period of time, and in April 1940 the new school was finally opened, although it was housed in provisional premises in the town's Memorial Hall whilst awaiting planning permission for new school buildings.⁹ Considering the Education Committee's support for multilateralism it was not unexpected that Anglesey would put forward a multilateral scheme in the wake of the 1944 Education Act. The Act expected LEAs to submit Development Plans to central government, showing how they would reorganise secondary education in order to provide free schooling to all age-appropriate children in line with the new legislation. It was equally unsurprising that the rationale behind the comprehensive scheme, which was very much influenced by educational thinking from the 1930s, constituted continuity rather than change in terms of the views and ideas of the Education Committee. Nonetheless, the scheme which emerged on Anglesey post-1953 *did* reorganise the county's schools into comprehensives, and this constituted a pioneering experiment. Anglesey's scheme actually remained the sole example of a fully comprehensive system in England and Wales until the mid-1960s.¹⁰

Whilst these developments progressed on Anglesey, comprehensive schooling was far from advancing on a national level. Central government had continually favoured a segregated system of secondary education throughout the post-war period and into the early 1960s. During the 1920s and 1930s Central Schools had been encouraged, and in the wake of the 1944 Education Act the tripartite system (grammar, technical and modern schools) was preferred by central government even though the 1944 Act did not specifically legislate for three separate types of secondary schools.¹¹ In the aftermath of the 1944 Education Act most LEAs introduced some kind of segregated system, although very few offered technical education in especially dedicated schools, leaving most

⁹ A[mlwch] C[ounty] S[chool], 'Minutes', 5 April 1940, Llangefni, AA: WA 16/1.

¹⁰ The fact that the system was fully comprehensive was significant since it meant that Anglesey's comprehensive schools did not operate alongside other types of schools (such as grammar and independent schools). In LEAs where limited experiments were being carried out, such as London or Swansea, comprehensive schools tended to 'lose out' on the most academically gifted pupils who would either attend the local grammar school or be sent to independent schools by their parents.

¹¹ MoE, 'An Act to reform the law relating to education in England and Wales', 3 August 1944, London, TNA ED 151.

schemes bilateral rather than trilateral.¹² However, as the 1950s progressed, public support for selective secondary education declined as the 11-plus examination attracted cumulative scrutiny and criticism.¹³ Public opinion was also turning against selection at the age of eleven due to (particularly, but not exclusively) middle-class parents' dissatisfaction in cases where their children were assigned places in secondary modern schools. This disapproval was a result of the common perception that in order to succeed, children had to attend a grammar school. While technical schools were considered less prestigious than grammar schools, 'secondary moderns' were persistently understood to be of inherently lower status than the other two types of secondary schools. The fact that secondary modern schools were 'free' from the pressures of examinations also reinforced the stigma already attached to these institutions as dedicated to children with less hopeful prospects for the future.¹⁴ This situation resulted in a gradual increase in public pressure for educational reform, and there were calls for more pupils to be allowed to benefit from a 'grammar school education'. The Labour Party had pledged its support for the abolition of the 11-plus examination in its 1955 manifesto, and by the 1959 general election a majority of parents were reported to want to see the end of selection at age eleven.¹⁵

¹² A minority of LEAs made great efforts in order to provide separate technical education, but generally the provision was poor or completely lacking. In January 1949 over 3,000 secondary modern schools and 1,229 grammar schools had been established. Conversely, technical schools only numbered 310 and by 1951 only three new technical schools had actually been built. See, for example, R. Lowe, *Education in the Post War Years: A Social History* (London, 1988), p. 43 and M. Sanderson, *The Missing Stratum Technical School Education in England 1900-1990s* (London, 1994).

¹³ A range of books and studies criticising the 11-plus examination came out during the 1950s. See, for example, B. Simon, *Intelligence Testing and the Comprehensive School* (London, 1953); O. Banks, *Parity and Prestige in English Secondary Education A Study in Educational Sociology* (London, 1955); P. Vernon (ed.), *Secondary School Selection* (London, 1957) and A. Yates and D. Pidgeon, *Admission to Grammar Schools* (London, 1957).

¹⁴ See, M. Holt, *Schools and curriculum change* (Maidenhead, 1980), p. 3. Figures published by an NUT survey in 1963 clearly showed the poor provisions made in many secondary modern schools. For example, seventy per cent of such schools had no special needs teacher, ninety-three per cent were without a specialist engineering teacher and forty-five per cent were without a gymnasium. Referenced in G. O'Hara, *Governing Post-War Britain The Paradoxes of Progress, 1951-1973* (Basingstoke, 2012), p. 160.

¹⁵ For the 1955 Labour Party Manifesto, see 'Labour Party: 1955' Forward With Labour: Labour's Policy for the Consideration of the Nation', [<http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab55.htm>, accessed 11 October 2015]. This general trend in public opinion in Great Britain as a whole is cited in O'Hara, *Governing Post-War Britain*, p. 162.

The Labour government under Harold Wilson issued its Circular 10/65 (1965), and this was the first expression of official support by central government for the abolition of the 11-plus examination, and furthermore, it advocated that secondary schools be reorganised along comprehensive line.¹⁶ However, while Circular 10/65 was significant in its 'request' by central government for LEAs to start planning for comprehensivisation, by this time it was very much in line with public opinion. It was also estimated that more than half (around fifty-five per cent) of LEAs were already planning to submit reorganisation plans along some form of comprehensive lines by 1963.¹⁷

Very few studies have commented on the impact of pioneering LEAs on the details of Circular 10/65, but the circular was significantly influenced by those comprehensive schemes already in existence in various LEAs.¹⁸ Anthony Crosland (Education Secretary at the time of the implementation of Circular 10/65) later recognised the impact of existing schemes on the circular. He suggested that because of the lack of consensus '...on which type of organization was best on merit...' different options had to be put forward to LEAs.¹⁹ Crosland also observed that although the government had not undertaken any specific research on comprehensivisation prior to Circular 10/65 '...we had a number of comprehensive systems that had been going for quite a considerable time – in London and Leicestershire and elsewhere'.²⁰ This shows how the few comprehensive schemes in existence, such

¹⁶ MoE, 'Circular 10/65: The Organisation of Secondary Education', 12 July 1965, London, TNA: ED 147/827C.

¹⁷ E. Boyle, 'The Politics of Secondary School Reorganization: Some Reflections', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 4:2 (1970), pp. 28-38.

¹⁸ In the late 1980s Fearn commented that: 'Interestingly the Circular laid down national models for variants of the comprehensive school which were based very firmly on local schemes already formulated and frequently implemented, again emphasizing the vital importance of local initiatives', see E. Fearn, 'The Politics of Local Reorganization' in R. Lowe (ed.), *The Changing Secondary School* (Lewes, 1989), p. 38. The significance of the West Riding's middle-school model of comprehensive education has been analysed in D. Crook, 'The middle school cometh'... and goeth: Alec Clegg and the rise and fall of the English middle school', *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education*, 36:2 (2008), pp. 117-125. However, the analysis of the pioneering scheme in Leicestershire in K. J. Donald, 'The Reorganization of Secondary Education in Leicestershire, 1947-1984', in R. Lowe (ed.), *The Changing Secondary School* (Lewes, 1989), pp. 20-35 did not comment on the role such pioneering schemes played in the formation of Circular 10/65, or its consequences.

¹⁹ M. Kogan, *The Politics of Education Edward Boyle and Anthony Crosland in conversation with Maurice Kogan* (Harmondsworth, 1976), p. 188. Shirley Williams also emphasises the significant power LEAs possessed in relation to reorganisation in the wake of Circular 10/65 in her experience as a junior minister in Harold Wilson's government. She stresses the importance of 'goodwill' among the LEAs when it came to realising comprehensive reorganisation. See, S. Williams, *Climbing the Bookshelves* (London, 2009), p. 170.

²⁰ Kogan, *The Politics of Education*, pp. 188-189.

as those on Anglesey (even though Anglesey only warranted a reference as ‘elsewhere’ in Crosland’s interview), had been the prototypes upon which Circular 10/65 was modelled. Early pioneer schools had been surveyed by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate (HMI) and independent educationists by this time, and their findings seemed to suggest that anxieties over the fate of academically gifted pupils and their performance in comprehensive schools had been largely unfounded.²¹ In fact, Pedley commented in his survey (1954) about Holyhead:

At Holyhead school – the example *par excellence* [sic] of the principle of “progressive differentiation” – three State scholarships and nine county major scholarships were gained last year; 45 Advanced level passes (including four distinctions) were gained by 19 pupils in G.C.E.; 327 Ordinary level passes were gained by 101 pupils – including a dozen who took a single subject from the sixth form...There is, then, no levelling down.²²

Thus, with the Labour government’s pledge in support of comprehensive schooling, and the publication of Circular 10/65, Anglesey’s education policy appeared not only to have been pioneering, but also to have been proven to be the ‘right’ choice. The County Council reported that they considered themselves lucky to have been ‘saved the predicament’ facing many other LEAs in the mid-1960s of having to completely reorganise their systems after 1965.²³

In order to examine Anglesey’s role within the wider educational context of the 1950s and 1960s, contemporary reports and observations regarding the LEA’s scheme need to be accounted for and evaluated. Because of its exclusive position in 1953, Anglesey’s reorganised education system attracted attention in the local press and in specialist education journals. These early reports generally portrayed a positive image of the ‘experiment’ being undertaken by the LEA, and did not attach particular political significance to the scheme. Some of the first articles dedicated to Anglesey’s new education system were published in *The Schoolmaster* (July 1953) and provided the background and a general overview of the newly implemented system. One article in *The*

²¹ The 1961 HMI report referred to ‘good examination results’ in Holyhead, see HMI, ‘Report: Holyhead County Secondary School’, 13-17 November 1961, Llangefni, AA: PRO, WA 4/22. Successful examination results from Anglesey were reported in national newspapers, see for example, *The Times*, 9 April 1965; *The Daily Mail*, 7 January 1965.

²² Pedley, R., ‘Comprehensive Schools Today: an Interim Survey (1)’, *Education*, 8 October, 1954, pp. 518-520.

²³ *Holyhead & Anglesey Mail*, 24 April 1964.

Schoolmaster emphasised the gap between the significant amounts of theorising on the subject of comprehensive education compared to the lack of opportunity to actually observe such systems in practice. Therefore, in keeping with the majority of articles dedicated to the issue of the reorganisation of Anglesey's secondary education at this time, the main focus was on how the scheme worked in practice.²⁴ During this early period of the comprehensivisation process, the big national newspapers did not explicitly report on Anglesey's implementation of its new system. However, in February 1953 *The Guardian* commented on the county's abolition of the 11-plus examination in a general article dedicated to this issue of secondary school selection.²⁵ In 1954, Welsh and local newspapers also published items describing the changes to Anglesey's education system, emphasising the LEA's pioneering role in articles such as 'Britain is watching this school experiment, Anglesey leads the way' and 'Teachers Eyes are on this experiment'.²⁶ Education journals also dedicated significant attention to Anglesey's scheme, and Trevor Lovett (the head teacher in Holyhead) produced numerous articles for *The Schoolmaster*, *Teacher in Wales* and the *Times Educational Supplement (TES)*.²⁷ This shows, despite the lack of interest in consequent historiography, the extent of contemporary interest in Anglesey's comprehensive schools.

It was not only the local press and specialist periodicals that showed an interest in Anglesey's newly devised scheme, and as the 1960s emerged, interest in the education system increased. With general opinion gradually turning against selection at age eleven, and several other LEAs also starting to consider options for comprehensive reorganisation, support for such school organisation was increasing. During the first half of the 1960s, even consecutive Conservative Education

²⁴ See "'Secondary Education for all" has a new meaning in Anglesey's Comprehensive Schools', *The Schoolmaster*, 3 July 1953, pp. 19, 27 and 'Comprehensive School at Work', *The Schoolmaster*, 10 July 1953, pp. 52-53. Similar focus on the organisation in a comprehensive school, particularly in Holyhead due to its early amalgamation in 1949, were also published in the mid-50s in an article by Lovett in *TES*, 6 February 1953.

²⁵ *The Guardian*, 21 February 1953.

²⁶ See, *Liverpool Daily Post*, 19 January 1954; *Herald of Wales*, 30 January 1954; *Western Mail & South Wales News*, 12 February 1954 and *Evening Chronicle*, 12 February 1954.

²⁷ See, for example, *TES*, 6 February 1953; *TES*, 27 January 1956; *The Schoolmaster*, 17 October 1958; *The Teacher in Wales*, November 1960; *The Teacher in Wales*, March 1961; *Teacher in Wales*, 16 June 1967 and *Teacher in Wales*, 30 June 1967.

Secretaries had to accept certain (albeit limited) moves towards comprehensive schooling despite their Party's general resistance towards such reform.²⁸ It was within this context that HMI undertook its inspection of the county's schools in 1961. The inspection report actually commented on the marked interest shown in Anglesey's scheme, and it was suggested that because Anglesey's comprehensive system had been:

[E]arly in the field it has had to face...the challenge of a new idea, the absence of established precedents, of accepted practice, and the necessity of proving itself to a more obvious and more 'public' degree than the traditional form of secondary education.²⁹

Apart from recognising issues related to the LEA's pioneering role, HMI also acknowledged the subsequent pressures of defending and justifying the system as a result of consistent interest among external observers. All four secondary schools were inspected by HMI in 1961, and it was somewhat ironic that the introduction to the inspection report for Amlwch, Llangefni and Beaumaris (Holyhead was issued a separate report) specifically pointed out that the timing of a general assessment of the organisation of Anglesey's comprehensive schools was 'not inopportune'. It was suggested that after eight years of comprehensive schooling it would be possible to evaluate the scheme's successes and weaknesses.³⁰ Lovett's comments in a letter to the educationist (and one of the most prominent commentators on comprehensive schooling during this time) Robin Pedley in the same year (1961) illustrate the situation quite appositely, with Lovett suggesting that:

This full Inspection is part of the Ministry's plan that certain comprehensive schools have been in existence long enough to stand the test of a Full Inspection. I can only hope that we have weathered the storm...³¹

Central government undoubtedly felt that it was timely to evaluate this experimental comprehensive scheme, and an HMI inspection was an effective way to do so. Lovett's hope that

²⁸ For more on this, see for example, B. Simon, 'Pedley, Robin (1914–1988)', rev. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39992>, accessed 3 Sept 2014]; C. Knight, *The Making of Tory Education Policy in Post War Britain 1950-1986* (Lewes, 1990), p. 23; M. Kogan, *The Politics of Educational Change* (Manchester, 1978), pp. 78, 94; *The Times*, 8 April 1965 and E. Boyle, 'The Politics of Secondary School Reorganization: Some Reflections', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 4:2 (1970), pp. 28-38.

²⁹ HMI, 'Report: Holyhead County Secondary School', 13-17 November 1961, Llangefni, AA: WA 4/22.

³⁰ HMI 'Report: Amlwch, Beaumaris and Llangefni secondary schools', summer and autumn 1961, London, TNA: ED 216/27.

³¹ TLPF, 'Letter from Lovett to Pedley', 23 November 1961, Llangefni, AA: WA 18/53.

they had ‘weathered the storm’ indicates the feeling of responsibility as perceived by those involved in pioneering comprehensive schools, and the desire to prove the virtues of these institutions. It was not just the MoE that was looking to Anglesey for evidence of the outcomes of comprehensive education in practice, but sustained interest was also expressed among both supporters and detractors among politicians, educationists, other LEAs and the general public.³² Pedley was one such interested party, and his response to Lovett on reading the 1961 inspection report was congratulatory, emphasising ‘the splendid work you have done at Holyhead’.³³ Despite going on to suggest that ‘the whole country owes a very great debt to you for your pioneer work’, Pedley had nevertheless identified negative effects that this kind of scrutiny might have on pioneering LEAs and their activities.³⁴ His assessment was that pioneers had been forced to occupy a middle-ground with their comprehensive schemes for ‘tactical’ reasons. Newly developed schemes had to be in line with local opinion, and due to the kind of attention illustrated above, schools were compelled to justify their activities through examination results in order to prove that comprehensive schools did not result in ‘grammar type’ pupils’ achievements being levelled down.³⁵ Each comprehensive school had to ‘justify itself by examination results, or parents will lose confidence in it..[and a school]..has only to deliver the goods (in the form of G.C.E. results and university scholarships)...to justify itself in both public and professional opinion’.³⁶

This reveals several aspects of the attention that Anglesey’s schools were attracting. Evidently, the county’s schools had generated ample interest from various observer in the local press, education journals and the HMI. The Inspectorate had clearly stated its aim to scrutinise Anglesey’s

³² For a few examples of the interest paid to Holyhead School, see TLPF, ‘Letter from Peggy Crane, Local Government Officer from Labour Party’, 8 August 1958, Llangefni, AA: WA 18/53 and TLPF, ‘Letter from the Secretary of the Labour Party Standing Committee on the Sciences and Education’, 3 June 1964, Llangefni, AA: WA 18/53. Lovett’s personal file also contains correspondence from disparate groups such as the Ty Croes Camp Wives’ Club, The Secondary School Examination Council and the NUT, see TLPF, Llangefni, AA: WA 18/53.

³³ TLPF, ‘Letter from Pedey to Lovett’, 11 October 1963, Llangefni, AA: WA 18/53.

³⁴ TLPF, ‘Letter from Robin Pedley to Lovett’, 11 October 1963, Llangefni, AA: WA 18/53.

³⁵ R. Pedley, ‘Comprehensive Schools Today: an Interim Survey (3)’, *Education*, 22 October, 1954, p. 519.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 612.

comprehensive schools in view of their reorganisation eight years earlier. Therefore, it was thought feasible to evaluate the institutions' successes and weakness in relation to their status as comprehensive schools. It also shows how the attention on pioneering schools was perceived to have affected the running of them. Because of the overwhelming interest among external observers in examination results, it was felt that comprehensive schools were pressurised into primarily focussing on their more academically gifted pupils. Lovett's comment in relation to the 1961 inspection, hoping that they had 'weathered the storm', demonstrates the sentiment among comprehensive school head teachers that they needed to prove themselves to external observers. Similar thoughts were also expressed by Llangefni's head teacher (E. D. Davies) in his comment in 1965 that:

This school is a bit of a sweat shop. We are all so anxious to prove ourselves. I think all comprehensives err on the academic side. It stems from the original desire to prove that the best people do not suffer.³⁷

In the same year a School Inspector also highlighted the intense scrutiny that Anglesey's schools were under. The great number of visitors, who had come to observe the schools and the running of the comprehensive system in practice, was also pointed out. The Inspector believed that these visitor numbers amounted to higher figures than 'in any other area known to me'. The LEA was described as 'often distressed, knowing only too well that standards in Anglesey schools are not what they should be...'³⁸

The scrutiny of Anglesey's schools did not abate as the 1960s progressed, but rather intensified around the time of Circular 10/65. This was hardly surprising giving the fact that the County still possessed the only fully comprehensive system in England and Wales. The discussion in the national press at the time suggests that it was generally felt that sufficient research had not yet been undertaken to evaluate the outcomes of educational reform along comprehensive lines. *The Times*

³⁷ *The Times*, 3 April 1965.

³⁸ The notes were prepared in advance of a deputation to Anglesey on 27 April 1965 to discuss staff numbers and the need to increase Anglesey's teacher quota, see HMI, 'Notes ahead of deputation in April 1965', 14 April 1965, London, TNA: ED 216/29.

published 'Comprehensives: A Closer Look' in April 1965, a nine-part series of articles considering a range of aspects related to comprehensive education. One article specifically pointed out the need for more research, suggesting that: 'The greatest weakness of those who try to sway emotions for or against comprehensive schools is that their views are generally unsupported by facts, especially educational facts'.³⁹ Earlier the same year *The Daily Mail* had also concluded that: 'The most astonishing fact about the comprehensive – versus – grammar school row...is the lack of facts'.⁴⁰ While there had been some attempts to evaluate comprehensive schooling prior to 1965, these studies were often written by proponents of the system and were limited in scope due to the lack of wholly comprehensive schemes to investigate.⁴¹ Such assessments of comprehensive schemes were not wide-ranging or scientific studies, and were generally not considered rigorous enough to inform formal political policy. Therefore, because of the dearth of official government-led investigation into the outcomes of comprehensive schooling, existing examples such as Anglesey were the only available indicators of such outcomes.

The widespread support for secondary school reform during this time is evident in the national press. Despite the limited experience of comprehensive systems in England and Wales and the shortage of research, the overwhelming impression in the press was that comprehensive education was, on the whole, desirable. Reports on comprehensive schools during 1964 and 1965 often used Anglesey, and particularly the school in Holyhead, as an indicator of how successful comprehensive education had proven to be. The system was described as 'strikingly successful' in educating those children who would otherwise have attended grammar schools. Ten years into the new scheme,

³⁹ *The Times*, 8 April 1965.

⁴⁰ *The Daily Mail*, 7 January 1965.

⁴¹ See, for example, Pedley, 'Comprehensive Schools Today: an Interim Survey (1)', *Education*, 8 October, 1954, pp. 518-520; R. Pedley, 'Comprehensive Schools Today: an Interim Survey (2)', *Education*, 15 October 1954, pp. 564-568; Pedley, 'Comprehensive Schools Today: an Interim Survey (3)', pp. 612-613 and NUT, *Inside the Comprehensive School* (London, 1958). During the early 1960s the journal for comprehensive education *Forum* often carried articles with case studies and individual teachers' and head teachers' experiences of implementing forms of comprehensive education. See, for example, Simon, J., 'Report from South Wales', *Forum*, 1:2 (1959), pp. 42-49; N. Read-Collins, 'Social Integration in the Comprehensive School', *Forum*, 3:1 (1960), pp.3-7 and L. J. Culcheth, 'Autonomy within the Comprehensive School', *Forum*, 6:1 (1963), pp. 21-23.

twice as many pupils were taking Ordinary-level examinations, and the number of A-level students had increased threefold.⁴² Anglesey was reported to be very proud of its record for General Certificate of Education (GCE) results, and Lovett's claim that '200 children who would have failed 11-plus have GCE passes since the school turned comprehensive...' was quoted.⁴³ A report on Anglesey in *The Times* portrayed a more multifaceted picture of the situation, especially with respect to the question whether comprehensive schooling benefitted 'less gifted' pupils. Some serious doubts as to the value of the comprehensive set-up for the 'not-so-bright' children were expressed by teachers and parents in these interviews. One parent (who was also a teacher at Llangefni School) commented that:

If my son is bright enough to go into the G.C.E. stream, my wife and I will be happy to see him in a comprehensive school. But if he does not turn out so bright, then I would rather him be in a secondary modern. In these comprehensives, my sympathies are with the backward children.⁴⁴

Another teacher also raised concerns, stating that:

At first I was prepared to give the new system a trial. Now I favour the old split. Bright children can be very cruel. It is the not-so-bright who suffer...There is no doubt in my mind that the bad pull down the better.⁴⁵

However, despite these reservations being clearly put forward in *The Times* article, the overall assessment of Anglesey's schools in the report was that the experiment had been a success.⁴⁶ The reason for this rather one-sided evaluation of the situation can be found in a follow-up article a few days later. This time the author used examination results from Holyhead to try and assess claims made by Crosland that neither academically gifted 'grammar type' children, nor those pupils of 'less intellectual ability', would lose out in a comprehensive school setting. The article's author concluded:

What are the facts? Who is right? I have studied two traditional grammar schools that long ago were turned into comprehensives. On the evidence from these two

⁴² *The Guardian*, 6 December 1964.

⁴³ *The Daily Mail*, 7 January 1965.

⁴⁴ *The Times*, 3 April 1965.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

schools, which one would hope but cannot prove are typical, Mr. Crosland is right.⁴⁷

Thus, Anglesey's case was repeatedly used as an example to strengthen the case for comprehensive education on the broader, national, stage. Curiously, despite various reservations expressed by teachers and parents in some of the national newspaper reports as to the benefits to less able pupils, the overall evaluation was nevertheless positive. The *Daily Mail*, as a right of centre newspaper, questioned the general lack of research but its overall assessment of the Anglesey scheme was nevertheless encouraging. It is notable that regardless of the political stance of *The Guardian*, *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*, they all rendered Anglesey's scheme a success. This can, in part at least, be ascribed to the overwhelming concern with examination results. The general debate had concentrated on the potential effects of comprehensivisation on academically gifted pupils, and this focus remained.⁴⁸ While there might have been a general dearth of research into the consequences of comprehensive schooling generally, the perceived academic success of Anglesey's (and other pioneers') schools had attracted attention and seemed to warrant confidence in the comprehensive system as far as 'grammar type' pupils were concerned. Therefore, in contrast to the initial stages of the comprehensivisation process in the 1950s, the significance of early reformers within the wider educational context is evident to see in this later period.

The prominence of Anglesey's role within the broader educational context during the 1950s and 1960s has thus become evident. Anglesey's schools were regularly referenced in journal and newspaper articles and also attracted interest among educationist, politicians, schools and LEAs. The nature of the reports produced during the 1950s, compared to those published about a decade later,

⁴⁷ *The Times*, 9 April 1965.

⁴⁸ Apart from comments in the national press, the parliamentary debate lead-up to the 1965 motion in favour of Circular 10/65 was also indicative of the significance of the grammar school question in the political debate. The majority of the contributions to the debate, on both sides of the house, were concerned with the implications for grammar school children and grammar education. See HC Deb 21 January 1965, vol 705, cols 413-541.

differed considerably. While early articles had focused on describing the system and the organisation of the schools, the emphasis in the mid-1960s was quite different. By that time comprehensivisation had become a politically polarised issue, and this was reflected in the contemporary debate. The momentum of public opinion in favour of the abolition of the 11-plus examination, in combination with central government's pro-comprehensive agenda, resulted in Anglesey's system being used to illustrate educational successes within a comprehensive set-up. Despite several indications during the 1960s that Anglesey's scheme was showing inconsistency in its achievements, external observers still described it as a success. It was often acknowledged that Anglesey's scheme had been a solution to practical problems and therefore based on 'efficiency and economy, not ideology', but it was nevertheless portrayed as a generalised model of comprehensive schooling when it was used to bolster the case for reform.⁴⁹ One teacher suggested in an interview in *The Times* that even though the system worked well in an area such as Anglesey, this did not necessarily mean it would be equally successful in large urban centres.⁵⁰ The fact that the system had evolved through the conversion of four grammar schools was also regularly emphasised.⁵¹ However, despite these peculiarities, general conclusions were nonetheless drawn from Anglesey's experiences.

Newspaper reports (in both left- and right-leaning publications) tended to reflect the general public opinion that selective examinations should be abolished – and replaced with some type of non-selective comprehensive schooling. In reality, Anglesey's scheme long pre-dated central government's Circular 10/65 and its rationale had been significantly different to those among LEAs clamouring for change during the mid-1960s. Nevertheless, Anglesey's school organisation was portrayed as a model example of examination success, which helped to boost the policy of central government, despite the fact that the county's system was often acknowledged as an atypical case.

⁴⁹ See *The Guardian*, 6 December 1964. In *The Times* it was considered a decision '...in favour of expediency, see *The Times*, 3 April 1965. The *Daily Mail* described the transition on Anglesey as '...more economic and efficient in a scattered rural area', see *Daily Mail*, 7 January 1965.

⁵⁰ *The Times*, 3 April 1965.

⁵¹ See, for example, *The Times*, 3 April 1965; *The Guardian*, 6 December 1964 and *The Daily Mail*, 7 January 1965.

This led to Anglesey's case being incorporated into the narrative of the so called 'comprehensive movement', even though it had arguably never actually been part of it.

In light of the interest paid to pioneering schemes during this time, and the role they played as the original models for comprehensive schools in England and Wales, this article suggests that the virtual exclusion of these schemes in the historiography constitutes a misrepresentation of the contemporary situation. There are several reasons why this occurrence has developed. The most obvious cause can be found in perceptions relating to the rationale behind Anglesey's education system. If and when the motives behind the scheme are commented upon in history books, they are predominantly limited to a few words on the impracticality of implementing bilateral or trilateral systems in a rural LEA such as Anglesey.⁵² Because of its rural situation and sparse population figures, the establishment of two or three parallel 'types' of secondary schools was seen as unpractical and uneconomical on Anglesey. Therefore, early rural schemes have often been written-off as practical solutions in rural areas, lacking in any political rationales – and therefore of less interest to those historians writing the political history of comprehensivisation. Even though practical issues played an important part in the rationale behind Anglesey's comprehensive scheme, to consider it a wholly pragmatic measure is too simplistic.⁵³ Whether the scheme was ideologically inspired or not is, however, irrelevant in this context. It is difficult to evaluate exactly how the attention paid to Anglesey's scheme might have affected wider developments and school organisation elsewhere. However, it is evident that Anglesey's system of 'all-through' 11-18 comprehensive schools was broadly examined and observed as a model for how to run and organise these kinds of institutions. Apart from written accounts, there were also countless visits to the schools by individuals as well as representatives from LEAs, universities and other schools

⁵² For examples of brief comments on early pioneers, with links to their 'practicality', see for example, M. Benn, *School Wars*, p. 37, 49; D. Rubinstein and B. Simon, *The evolution of the comprehensive school*, pp. 46-47 and D. Crook, 'Local Authorities and Comprehensivisation in England and Wales, 1944-1974', *Oxford Review of Education*, 28:2/3 (2002), p. 248.

⁵³ For more on this, see K. A. S., 'Pioneering Comprehensive Schooling. The Politics of Education: Reform and Response on Anglesey, circa 1935-1974', unpublished PhD thesis, Bangor University (2016).

throughout the 1950s and 1960s.⁵⁴ Further study of developments in LEAs elsewhere might be able to reveal more detailed evidence of the responses among those LEAs and schools that looked to Anglesey's scheme when designing 11-18 schools in their areas.

Nevertheless, a strong case exists for the re-introduction of early pioneers into mainstream scholarship since their near absence in the historiography constitutes a misrepresentation of events as they unfolded. Therefore, the lack of analysis of early comprehensive reformers is not due to their insignificant role within contemporary developments, but rather because of a lack of interest and analysis of these allegedly apolitical pioneers in subsequent scholarship and historiography.

⁵⁴ TLPF, Llangefni, AA: WA 18/53.